

Message Text

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LIMDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS CIA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR PINT ET US

SUBJECT: BIRU BROTHERS AND NORTHERN SHOA INSURGENCY

REF: (A) USDAO 0251 APRIL: (B) USDAO 0242 APRIL

1. SUMMARY. AMERICAN SOUTHERN BAPTIST MISSIONARIES LIVING IN AND AROUND MEHAL-MEDA IN THE MENZ-GISHE DISTRICT (NORTHERN SHOA) VISITED EMBASSY APRIL 8 TO REPORT LOCAL SECURITY SITUATION IN THEIR AREA AND TO TRANSMIT A LETTER "TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT" FROM THE BIRU BROTHERS. THE LETTER (BEING FORWARDED BY AIRGRAM) IS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF THE AMMUNITION REPLENISHMENT DECISION, DESCRIBES THE GROUP'S ACTIONS IN THE MENZ-GISHE DISTRICT AND LISTS THE GROUP'S MAIN LEADERS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE LETTER STATES THAT THE INSURGENTS CONTROL THE TOWN OF RABELL (MISSIONARIES CONFIRM) AND ARE COMPOSED OF 3,000 "ARMED AND ACTIVE FREEDOM FIGHTERS." GROUP ALLEGES THE LOCAL SUPPORT OF "OVER 300,000

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PEOPLE ENGAGED IN PROVIDING FOOD, CLOTHING, SHELTER AND INTELLIGENCE

SERVICE." IT REPORTS AN INCIDENT ALLEGED TO HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN LATE JANUARY IN WHICH EPMG FORCES SUFFERED 160 CASUALTIES. THE LETTER CONTINUES THAT IN FEBRUARY, THE MEHAL-MEDA-ADDIS ROAD AND TELEPHONE LINES WERE CUT (CONFIRMED BY RELIABLE SOURCES) AND "CONSTANT DAMAGE IS BEING INFLICTED ON THEM WITH THE COOPERATION OF THE PEOPLE IN DIYA AND FENKUTA." THE LETTER LISTS OTHER ENGAGEMENTS, INCLUDING RECENT CLASHES NEAR THE TOWN OF MOLLALE "WHERE AT LEAST 25 GOVERNMENT SOLDIERS WERE KILLED." IN RABELL, INSURGENTS BURNED THE POLICE STATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES WITHOUT CASUALTIES "SINCE THE POLICE HAD FLED THE TOWN PRIOR TO OUR ARRIVAL" (MISSIONARIES CONFIRM). THE INSURGENTS CLAIM THAT THE DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR GRAZMATCH ASFAW HAS JOINED THEM AND THE DISTRICT OF GISHE IS UNDER THEIR "COMPLETE CONTROL" (MISSIONARIES CONFIRM). MISSIONARIES ALSO CONFIRMED THE LETTER'S STATEMENT THAT EPMG FORCES DEFENDING MEHAL-MEDA AND MOLLALE LACK FOOD. THE MISSIONARIES REPORT THAT MOST LOCAL INHABITANTS HAVE LEFT MEHAL-MEDA. THE REMAINING POPULACE, MOSTLY TEACHERS, OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS AND MILITARY, ARE NOT "MUNZIES" AND THEREFORE SUPPORT THE EPMG.

3. THE LETTER LISTS THE FOLLOWING LEADERS OF THE BIRU BROTHERS' GROUP: LIJ. MERID BIRU, CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL; LIJ. MESFIN BIRU, VICE-CHAIRMAN AND SECRETARY OF THE COUNCIL; COL. WOLDE BELHU (A RETIRED POLICE OFFICER AND GRADUATE OF HOLATA MILITARY ACADEMY 1945 - AND ABADINA POLICE COLLEGE - 1965), LIAISON OFFICER; AND MAJOR MENGISTE DEFAR, CHIEF COORDINATOR OF THE ARMED FORCE. THE GROUP CALLS ITSELF ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE LIBERATION FRONT AND STATES THAT "EVEN A WORD OR TWO (CONCERNING THE GROUP) ON THE VOICE OF AMERICA "AFRICAN PANORAMA" WOULD ENCOURAGE US GREATLY." NOTE: AS HE ACCEPTED THE LETTER, EMBOFF STATE THAT WHILE THE UNITED STATES WAS EAGER TO KNOW ABOUT EVENTS IN ETHIOPIA AND APPRECIATED MISSIONARIES' VISITS, IT WAS NOT IN THE BUSINESS OF AIDING ETHIOPIAN INSURGENTS. END NOTE.

4. AMERICAN MISSIONARIES GAVE REPORT, BELIEVED TO BE ACCURATE, OF INSURGENT ACTIVITY REPORTED REF MESSAGE. CONTRARY TO PARA 1 REF B, THE MEHAL-MEDA BRIDGE, WHICH IS NOT FAR FROM MISSIONARIES'S HOME, WAS BURNED BY LOCAL LANDLORD AND EMPG SUPPORTER. MISSIONARIES BELIEVE BRIDGE WAS BURNED BY SIGNAL ARMY TROOPS TO COME AND ATTACK BIRU BROTHERS. UPON LEARNING THAT THE BRIDGE HAD BEEN DESTROYED,

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THE MISSIONARIES APPROACHED IT TO SEE THE EXTENT OF THE DAMAGE. ARMY TROOPS WERE BY THE BRIDGE AND AN ESTIMATE 50 TO 80 SOLDIERS WERE DEPLOYED IN THE AREA. THEY WARNED THE MISSIONARIES TO RETURN HOME, AND THEN MACHINE GUNFIRE COMMENCED THROUGH THE AREA. THE MISSIONARIES OBSERVED ARMY TROOPS AS THEY BEGAN BURNING HOUSES IN THE AREA. ACCORDING TO THE MISSIONARIES, 286 HOMES WERE BURNED (CONFIRMS PART 2 REF B). FOR THE REST OF THE DAY, THE ARMY CONTINUED INDISCRIMINATE SHOOTING AND BURNING. THE MISSIONARIES

REPORTED 12 PEOPLE IMMEDIATELY KILLED AND 13 SINCE WHO HAVE DIED FROM WOUNDS. MOST OF THESE WERE WOMEN AND CHILDREN WHO OFFERED NO OPPOSITION TO THE TROOPS BUT WERE IN THE PROCESS OF FLEEING THEIR HOMES (MISSIONARIES ARE DOCTORS WHO HELPED TO TREAT WOUNDED AND DYING).

5. MISSIONARIES REPORTED THAT ON MARCH 31 A BUS WAS ATTACKED EITHER BY BANDITS, LOCAL PEOPLE ANGRY AT THE DESTRUCTION CAUSED BY THE ARMY, OR BY THE BIRU BROTHERS' GROUP. THE BUS DRIVER AND ONE SOLDIER WERE KILLED, TWO OTHER CIVILIANS WOUNDED AND THE PEOPLE WERE STRIPPED AND ROBBED (MISSIONARIES' DESCRIPTION COINCIDES CLOSELY WITH DESCRIPTION OF THE INCIDENT CONTAINED PART 3 REF B. MISSIONARY DOCTORS TREATED THE WOUNDED). EXCEPT FOR THE TWO DEAD AND TWO WOUNDED, ALL OTHERS ON THE BUS FLED THE AREA, MANY OF THEM NAKED, AND APPEARED LATER AT MOLLALE. THE SURVIVERS REPORTED THAT OVER 2000 "MUNZIES," MOSTLY WITH KNIVES AND CLUBS BUT WITH SOME ARMS, HAD ATTACKED THE BUS. THE MISSIONARIES STATED THAT SINCE MARCH 31, GOVERNMENT TROOPS HAVE BURNED TWO OTHER LARGE SETTLEMENTS IN THE MEHAL-MEDA AREA. ON THE EVENING OF MARCH 31 THE MISSIONARIES SAW 14 VEHICLES (ESTIMATED ONE BUS, ONE CAR, TWELVE TRUCKS WITH SOLDIERS) RETURN TO RETRIEVE THE BODIES FROM THE BUS INCIDENT. INSURGENTS ATTACKED THE COLUMN AND THIRTEEN WERE CAPTURED BY GOVERNMENT FORCES.

6. THE MISSIONARIES ASSUME THAT THE THREE BURNINGS AND BRUTAL ATTACKS ON LOCAL INHABITANTS WERE DUE TO THE TROOPS' ANGER AT THE "MUNZIES" FOR FAILING TO REPORT WHERE THE BIRU BROTHERS WERE LOCATED. ACCORDING TO THE MISSIONARIES, THE LOCAL POPULACE DOES NOT FULLY SUPPORT THE INSURGENTS BUT IS NOW ADAMANTLY OPPOSED TO THE EPMG AND GOVERNMENT TROOPS.

COMMENT: EMBASSY BELIEVES MISSIONARIES ARE REPORTING AS ACCURATELY
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AS POSSIBLE. THEY AND THE OTHER INHABITANTS OF THE AREA APPEAR TO BE TRAPPED BETWEEN THE INSURGENTS AND THE SOLDIERS. THEIR PRINCIPAL MISSION IS TO HELP THOSE NEEDING AID REGARDLESS OF POLITICAL PERSUASION. HOWEVER, THEY HAVE BEEN HORRIFIED BY THE ATROSTIESPERPETRATED BY GOVERNMENT TROOPS WHICH THEY HAVE WITNESSED.
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